

Nov. 30, 2016

Dear Members of the Families, Children and Seniors Committee,

Thank you for your time and concern on the progress of HB 4973, 4974 and 4975 that together make up Wyatt's Law. I am here as an active supporter of Wyatt's Law, an abused child myself, a woman who divorced due to an abusive ex, and a mother who has fought tirelessly for years to protect my own children from repeated abuse by their father. I have survived a system that did not protect me even after a decade of severe abuse and multiple reports. I have survived an abusive ex who turned that abuse toward our children once I filed for divorce. I have survived years of begging all of those who were supposed to help us to take action; to protect us; to hold our abuser accountable. I have been helpless as my children were forced to be alone with him and were threatened, terrified and abused. I have watched my children in the ER giving their statement to police and watched my trembling child be berated on the witness stand time and time again. I have watched them suffer such fear and anxiety that they both required medications and will for the foreseeable future. I have found my child after her suicide attempt, as her little sister watched and screamed. I have visited her in a facility and had to consider life without her. When a charge finally came we experienced a glimmer of hope, only to watch, stunned, as plea bargains stole what little justice we had found. He walks around today as if this never occurred. He "served his time", as the ACLU would put it. He is free to date women with helpless children like his own who will never be able to find a record of his conviction. He posts pictures online with children we do not know. Who is allowing a convicted abuser of his own children to be with their toddler? What would they give to know what we know? He is free to work, to travel, to continue his alcoholism, to further his education. He is free. But his victims are not.

His victims serve life sentences. His victims struggle through therapy, prescriptions, doctors, fear, anxiety, flashbacks, nightmares, shame, heartbreak, self-doubt, injustice and the reality that these things may never end. I parent broken children, while still broken myself. I never have a thought or make a choice that does not first consider their wellbeing. I maintain teams of professionals academically and medically to ensure their health and happiness. I wait for the moment my lawyer calls to say he is taking us back to court to have access to them again, because our system says he has learned his lesson. He is fixed. He is no longer a threat. His rights win because children are not voters. They can't sue departments, or hold press conferences, or donate to the ACLU. They can't hire private attorneys and claim defamation. They are silent victims. They are terrified at the thought of the

children he is around while appearing to be an upstanding citizen. They are more terrified than anyone making these laws, apparently.

We have a system that quantifies crime convictions and then turns its back. We put a number on what a victim's life is worth and we dare not consider the victim once that number is complete. We tell ourselves children are resilient. They are not. We tell ourselves children will forget. They do not. We tell ourselves convicted child abusers learn lessons and therefore society is safe. We are not.

I have joined this fight for Wyatt's Law because I am done with the notion that someone who chose to commit a violent crime against a child should have more rights than that child, or ANY child. I am done with the notion that we must be a reactionary society who mourns for lives destroyed by violence rather than taking the most basic steps to prevent it. We are done being told that we do not have the right to be aware of who we live among when our children's lives are at stake. Committing a crime against another human should cost you rights. It should be a terrifying proposition for the criminal. We should not be listening to the assertions of the ACLU today, when they are neither criminal nor victim. We should not be scared away from this necessary cause because a big name shows up to lobby abstract ideas while refusing to respect tens of thousands of realities. I have seen Shelli Weisberg claim this registry would never work because the Sex Offender Registry does not work, but I have yet to see any explanation of how this opinion is quantified. I can tell you that I use the PSOR often, and that I have absolutely been able to protect my family as a result. I have seen acquaintances on that registry whom I knew to be working with children and have notified their bosses personally. Apparently they hadn't bothered to do their own research as the children's parents believed they would. I have stopped my daughter from visiting a neighbor's home because I found that 2 men lived there who had committed sex crimes against girls. They are brothers. They live with their elderly parents who believe both sons are innocent, despite guilty pleas. Should I trust those elderly parents' judgment more than a court's? Should I assume those men are both trustworthy with my daughters?

The ACLU will tell you their rights are violated by me having this information. The ACLU will tell you people who urinate in public or have consensual sex with a teen girlfriend have their lives ruined by the PSOR so all registries are wrong. But law enforcement will tell you otherwise. Sheriff Tim Donnellon, my St. Clair County Sheriff and the new President of the Michigan Sheriff Association will tell you that is not reality. Those things have long since been ceased and are a fallacious argument for an indefensible position. It is quite simple to look at convictions for those things on the PSOR from decades ago and see that the person was 18 when convicted of sex with a 16 year old. We are all capable of doing that math

and making our own decisions accordingly. I have forgiven and accepted certain people who have those things in their past, and I know people who are employed and successful despite it, but the most important point is that I had the knowledge to make that decision rather than be left blind to it and find out after my child was victimized. I am at a loss as to what those opposing this registry believe a better solution would be, but I do know that had Erica Hammel had that resource Wyatt would be a healthy and thriving boy. Thousands of children would be saved from the lifetime of suffering in all its forms that violent crimes cause them because their caregivers would have the information they need to prevent contact in the first place. Law Enforcement will tell you that this is worth every call they don't receive because a child was never near an abuser in the first place. Medical professionals will tell you that the cost of this registry is a drop in the bucket when compared to what the State of Michigan pays for the care of abused children. Corrections officials will tell you that every crime avoided is a bed empty and money saved.

Wyatt is 4 and in just 3 years has easily approached nearly a million dollars in medical costs on Medicaid. He will need this care until 18 and will rely on State services as an adult as well. That is one case out of tens of thousands where this registry would have kept him a healthy child on private insurance with two employed parents. Just one case. Add to that the fact that one inmate in Michigan costs roughly \$40,000 per year for basic housing and care. All special needs, requirements, classes, testing, and all probation/parole are in addition to that \$40,000. Budgets realities are your job to consider and they are important. But they are not more important than children, their families, their futures and the will of your constituents when we call on you to take action in protecting them. Do not let lobbyists and dollars signs intimidate you. We have elected each of you to be our voice and to do what is right for Michigan families above all else. We are waiting, watching and we are not giving up on this fight. We will not forget your support or your inaction on this matter, and we are over 20,000 strong. We will be even bigger if we have to do this again next year. Indiana has done this with strong bipartisan support and in less time than Michigan has taken already. We know this can be done, and you know this should be done. For Wyatt, for my children, and for the innocent population in Michigan who cannot lobby for your favor, we implore you to stand up and take action. Thank you for your time and your service.

Sincerely,

Bridget Barras

